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# Area school counselors attend workshop on trade industries

By **MELISSA SCHUMAN** | mschuman@saratogian.com | The Saratogian  
March 4, 2023 at 3:00 p.m.

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GANSEVOORT, N.Y. — More than 75 school counselors gathered at the Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex (WSWHE) BOCES Conference Center for a workshop on awareness of the trade industries.

Presented by the Capital Region Workforce Development Coalition in partnership with WSWHE BOCES and the New York State School Counselor Association (NYSSCA), the workshop aimed to give school counselors more resources and tools to use when it comes to discussing post-graduation plans with students.

Whether those plans are for college or entering straight into the workforce in a trade, the important thing is for students to understand they have options.

“Our goal today is to inform counselors of the opportunities for students that aren’t the traditional four-year colleges,” explained Jaymes White, an assistant principal at Tamarac Secondary and a Regional Governor for the Executive Board of NYSSCA. “As people in trades are leaving the workforce, there’s an enormous gap that needs to be filled. There are great ways in the trade industries to engage students who are hands-on learners, without crippling them in debt.”

White continued, “an advantage to trades is that you get into it right away. You’re doing that work on day one. You might also get paid for doing it, with internships or apprenticeships or part time jobs. You don’t always have those options in college. It’s so important for students to know their options. Knowledge is power, and if students don’t have that power, how can they make the best informed decision for their future?”



The Capital Region Workforce Development Coalition was formed by Curtis Lumber, in conjunction with the Saratoga Builders Association. The Coalition's purpose is to encourage people to consider a career in the construction industry by bringing an awareness to the benefits associated with it. The coalition started out with a focus in Saratoga County and has now grown into a multi-county effort.

Doug Ford, chairman of the Coalition and vice president of sales and purchasing at Curtis Lumber, hoped that the workshop would be the first of many.

"This is exciting," Ford said. "Our goal is to help counselors understand the trades better. We realize it's been a shortcoming, and we're trying to make it better. They'll leave today with a lot of tools they can use back in their schools."

Echoing White's sentiments, Ford added, "we want students to have all the opportunities presented to them. It's all about the students and what they want to do. We'll never discourage a student from going to college, but we also want them to understand that there's a whole lot more to the trades than just a guy with a hammer in a ditch.

"You've got your project managers, your designers, there are so many different paths that a trade career can take. I really want to praise Curtis Lumber for stepping up and taking this initiative, they've done so much good work to raise awareness of the importance of trade careers."

Also in attendance were Assemblymembers Carrie Woerner (D-Round Lake) and Mary Beth Walsh (R-Ballston), lending their support.

"This is something we've been talking about for a really long time," Walsh commented. "It's a great topic. I'm hearing all the time about the importance of a skilled workforce."

The workshop consisted of many speakers who presented on different aspects of the trade industries. Some introduced tools that school counselors can use to help students explore trade careers, some discussed important talking points about trade industries, and some provided testimonials about their success in trades.

Ford addressed the question of "why trades?" In summary, the answer is a plethora of benefits that can be found in a trade career. These include job security, high pay, and a universal high demand for skilled workers that can take an employee anywhere they want to go – including around the world.

Ford also admitted that awareness of trade careers needs to be addressed more firmly, especially in today's society where inclusion and equality are priorities.

"In the early days, we did a horrible job of educating the schools about the trades, and that's on us," he stated. "It's important for students to know about these opportunities. It's equally important for girls to get into trades as much as guys."

Jim Sasko from Teakwood Builders talked about some of the many misconceptions surrounding

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“All those times a student looks at their geometry teacher and says ‘I’m never gonna need this’ – misconception,” Sasko said. “Your baseline skills in a trade career come from your middle school and high school curriculum. You need math, you need English, you need good communication skills. The idea that you have to choose either college or a trade – misconception. Trades and colleges are not exclusionary. In fact you can get into a trade through college.

“We have to understand that college isn’t a good fit for everyone. It’s important for many, certainly, but it’s not for everybody, and explaining that to parents can be challenging. Often when a child is interested in a trade, the greatest resistance will come from the parents who don’t have all the information or don’t understand what a trade career can involve.”

Sasko later remarked that the key to overcoming these misconceptions is time.

“It’s a learned process for folks to see there’s more opportunity in the trades, and a great chance to be known as a needed asset, more like pedestals of our society,” he remarked.

Gabe Johnson, Shea Grignon, and Julie Maleski-Putzel all gave personal testimonies about their experiences as women in successful trade careers.

Johnson, a commercial diver who does underwater work, said, “A career in the trades can really take you anywhere. Kids should know that they can get into the workforce quickly and start their lives quickly.”

Grignon, a construction worker, and Maleski-Putzel, an interior designer, wanted to raise awareness of the importance and need for women in trades.

“You can be a mom, you can be petite, you can be a female and be successful in this industry,” said Maleski-Putzel.

“I work hands-on. Getting women to understand that we’re just as needed as men is very important,” agreed Grignon. “Getting counselors to understand this is an option is also important. We want people to realize that we’re doing more than just swinging a hammer.”

“I want to overturn objections, especially from parents,” Maleski Putzel said. “A lot of times they just don’t have the information to understand the opportunities that are available. There’s a lot of different tools available, and technology has advanced so far in trades that it allows everyone – not just women – to do their jobs in the industry more efficiently. It’s helping to break these stereotypes that the only people who can be in trades are big strong men.

“The home-life balance has been turned upside down. More women are working, and when it comes to equity and inclusion we want people to understand that it’s a much more welcoming and open industry.”

Tools and resources presented for school counselors to use included the Expertise Project, which provides virtual reality tours of industry labs and worksites; Zippia, a comprehensive job search website that outlines the steps needed to get a job in any trade career with detailed descriptions

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“Hopefully there will be many more workshops like this in the future,” Nancy DeStefano, WSWHE BOCES Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Programs, said to the school counselors. “We hope that you find this worthwhile.”



Dozens of school counselors attended the workshop hosted by the Capital Region Workforce Development Coalition and WSWHE BOCES. (Melissa Schuman – MediaNews Group)



Dozens of school counselors attended the workshop hosted by the Capital Region Workforce Development Coalition and WSWHE BOCES. (Melissa Schuman – MediaNews Group)



Patrick Pomerville with the Capital Region Workforce Development Coalition speaks to school



Jim Sasko spoke at the School Counselors Workshop about overcoming misconceptions in the trade industry. (Melissa Schuman – MediaNews Group)



Doug Ford, regional vice president of sales at Curtis Lumber Co. and chairman of the Capital



A tool available to school counselors when discussing trade careers with students is a virtual reality simulator provided by Expertise Project. (Melissa Schuman – MediaNews Group)



Shea Grignon and Julie Maleski-Putzel gave testimonials about their success in the trade